

Making Sense of the Annual Growth Policy

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One of the least known and most effective tools the Council has to manage growth in Montgomery County is the Annual Growth Policy, or AGP. While Master Plans serve as blueprints, the AGP sets the timing for their implementation. Under the AGP process, the County Council provides guidance to County agencies on land use; growth management; and related environmental, economic, and social issues. The Annual Growth Policy has 2 components: the "Ceiling Element" and the "Policy Element".

The County Council must adopt the Ceiling Element annually. The Ceiling Element consists of annual limits on new housing and jobs based on the road capacity in each planning area in the County. The County Council is currently reviewing the ceiling element and has scheduled action in July.

The Council reviews the Policy Element every 2 years. The Policy Element consists of guidelines for the Planning Board and other County agencies for the administration of laws and regulations that affect growth and development. The Council last approved an update to the Policy Element in October. At that time, there were three major policy adjustments that the Council enacted to better address growth-related issues:

- First, the Council felt the road capacity estimates in the AGP did not accurately reflect the reality that all of us experience on a daily basis. In many parts of the County, excess road capacity would have increased the pace of development. As a result, we directed the Planning Board to re-examine the formula used for calculating road capacity.
- The Council also placed moratoriums on development in areas of the County where school classrooms are at capacity. Previously, classrooms had to be 10% over capacity before growth restrictions would kick in.
- Finally, the Council decided to require the projects at White Flint and Grosvenor Metro Stations to pay a development impact tax and limit parking at their developments. The tax on development will be used to pay for new bus service and road improvements along Rockville Pike and other areas in North Bethesda. The limits on parking at new developments will require future employers in that area to encourage alternatives to driving.

Because of its direct impact on the pace of development, I have been surprised that there is not more community involvement in the Annual Growth Policy. Although the AGP process establishes numerous opportunities for public involvement, historically only government staff and representatives of the development community historically participate in public worksessions. I believe a reason for this is the technical complexity

of the formulas and policies on which the AGP is based. I suspect that there is only a handful of professional staff people who truly understand it all. This complexity has no doubt created a high barrier of entry to many who want to get involved. If you'd like to learn more about the Annual Growth Policy worksessions, please check the Council's agenda and briefing materials at www.co.mo.md.us/council.